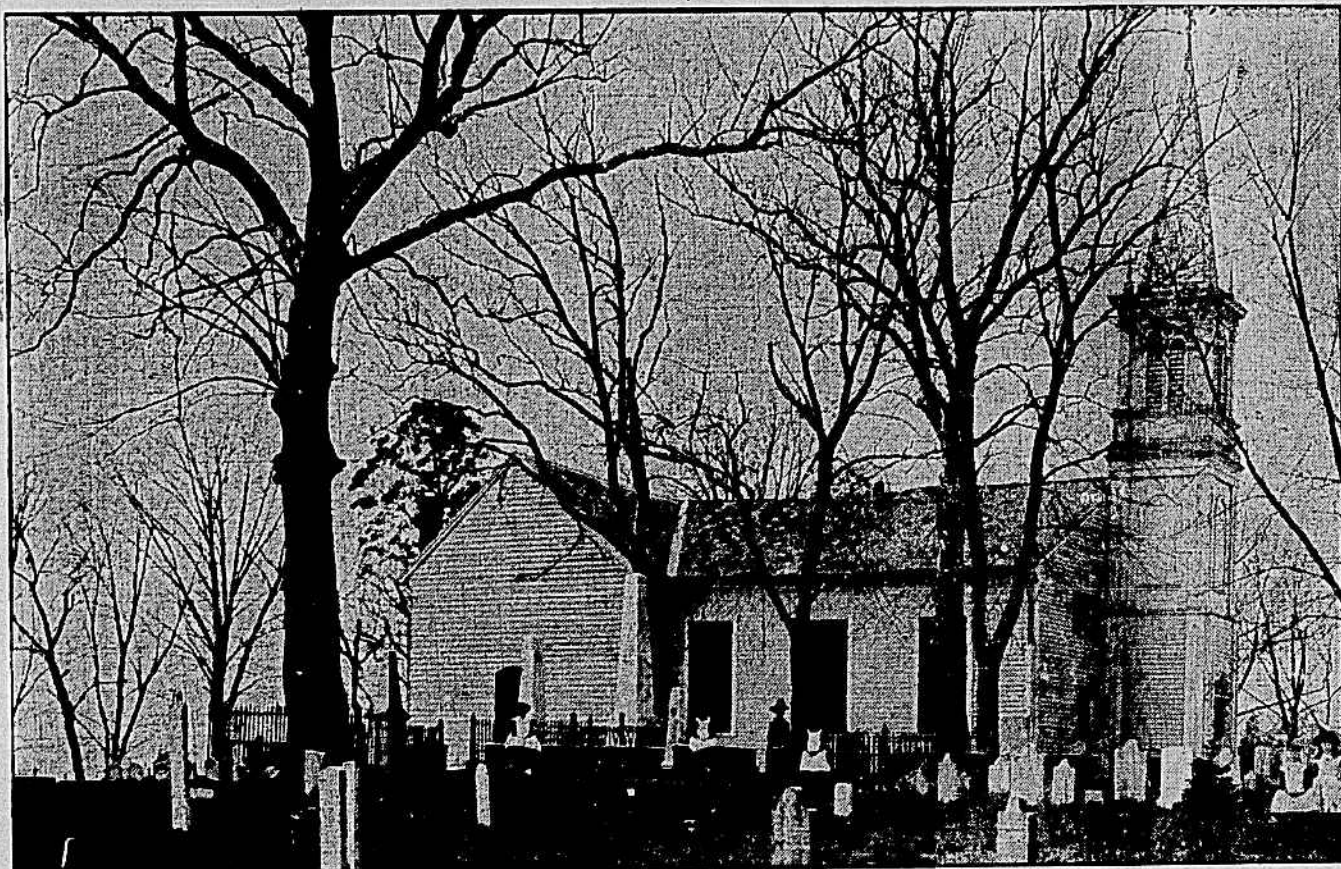




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OLD ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH, RICHMOND.

Here It Was That Patrick Henry Delivered His Famous Address Ending With the Words, "Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death."

## CHAPTER XXIII.

## PATRICK HENRY, VIRGINIA'S GREAT COMMONER.

We are now to return from our excursions westward to the stirring scenes associated with the bringing about of the great Revolutionary struggle. Perhaps as around no other person the incidents going immediately before the Declaration of Independence gather about the person and speech of Patrick Henry. He seems to have been raised up to be the prophet of the Revolution and the mouthpiece and exponent of those great dynamic principles which inspired the great struggle for liberty and crowned it with splendid success.

Between the earlier and later biographers of Mr. Henry there are many discrepancies, and consequently much confusion as to some of the facts of his life. He seems to have been of Scotch ancestry on his father's side. He was born at Studley, Hanover county, Va., May 29, 1736. This was the home of his mother, who was the widow of Colonel Symm at the time of her marriage to Colonel Henry. It will be remembered that it was of a visit to her home while on a tour of inspection of his estates that Colonel Byrd makes mention in the "Westover Manuscripts." At that time she was a hospitable and prepossessing widow. Her maiden name was Sarah Winston, a family of Welsh extraction, favorably known in many descendants throughout Virginia even to this day.

His father, Colonel Henry, was a native of Dundee, Scotland. He seems to have been a man of good culture and of fine standing in the community. He was a regimental commander, president of a magisterial court, and held the office of county surveyor, which in those days was an important and prominent position, for many years.

Mr. Henry was thoroughly well born, and on both sides of his family there was a lineage of which he might well be proud. He went to the neighborhood schools until he was ten years old, after which time he was taught by his father and an uncle who was a minister. The general impression that Patrick Henry was an uneducated man seems to be somewhat wide of the mark. He himself, doubtless, was largely respon-

sible for this impression, as he took no pains to parade any knowledge he might have; but, on the other hand, seemed for some reason disposed, by his speech and conduct, to encourage the idea that he was a man without education and training. The facts of the case, however, when thoroughly sifted, go to prove that while Mr. Henry could not in any broad sense be called a scholar, he was not without an education very far above the average received by the youth of his time. The fact that his pronunciation was wretched is not sufficient to stamp him as an uneducated man. It is said that Jefferson told Daniel Webster that Patrick Henry's pronunciation was vulgar and vicious. Governor John Page used to relate, on the testimony of his own ears, that Patrick Henry would speak of "the yearth and of men's naiteral parts as being improved by larning." Many cultivated men are open to the charge of ignorance if Mr. Henry is to be convicted on the above statements. There is room for belief that Mr. Henry, for reasons of expediency, encouraged the idea that he was not an educated man. He evidently thought that such an impression would the more closely identify him with the mass of people. There is proof that he received a good classical training at the hands of his father and of his uncle up to the age of fifteen years, and that his attainments in mathematics were not mean. Colonel Fontaine has an anecdote concerning a certain Frenchman who visited his grandfather's house while he was Governor. The French visitor was not able to speak English, and his grandfather not being able to speak French, they selected the Latin language as a medium of communication. If this story be true, there can be no doubt but that Mr. Henry's knowledge of Latin was far beyond that usually possessed even by educated men.

His manner of speech and method of writing, both in his private correspondence and in official documents, prove beyond any sort of doubt that Mr. Henry was a man of good intelligence, cultivation and attainments. It is said that he was very fond both of the Bible and of "Butler's Analogy." It would be quite impossible for one to be familiar with either of these books in any real and enthusiastic way and not be thoroughly competent to write and speak good English.